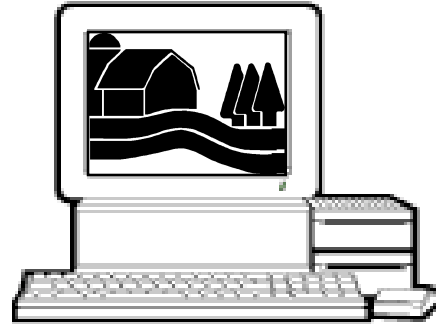


# Internet Marketing for Farmers

Agriculture and Natural Resources Fact Sheet #510



**M**arketing is key to the success of small-scale farming. One avenue of marketing that may offer significant rewards to farmers is internet marketing. Internet marketing can include the use of email and mailing lists, newsgroups and online forums, and/or the world wide web. The key idea behind internet marketing is to keep people coming back to your site by providing valuable content. In other words, give away useful information for free! Give away free reports, newsletters, tips, or recipes. Whatever the information is, if it is valuable and free, people will keep returning to your site, thereby increasing the chances that they will actually make a purchase from you.

The internet allows farmers and consumers direct contact in a way never before available. Many people and businesses (such as restaurants) do their shopping, including food shopping, online. The possibilities for internet marketing of farm products are vast, limited only by the imagination. More and more home based and small businesses are turning to the internet to get the word out about their products. Here are some reasons why (from *Guerrilla Marketing Online: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Earning Profits on the Internet* by Jay Conrad Levinson and Charles Rubin. 1997).

## Advantages of internet marketing

- + The internet allows you to broadcast your message to thousands of people at once without paying for expensive ads.
- + You can offer more information than in a printed brochure, including pictures (of products, farms, plants, animals), sounds, or even videos, and you can change your site whenever you want.
- + You can accept credit cards online.
- + Your target audience is paying attention. They *choose* to look at your web page.
- + The internet allows you to be in several places at once day and night.
- + The online marketplace puts small businesses on equal footing with large ones.
- + You can display merchandise and offer information about it.
- + The internet lets you focus on markets with precision. Online buyers sort themselves into specific interest groups. You can quickly build mailing lists as these members respond to your messages.
- + The internet offers resources that can support your business including discussion groups and databases with information to help respond to changing markets and trends.
- + Internet marketing is not limited to having a web page. Email lists, newsletters, and catalogs offer other means of reaching customers.

## Examples

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Many farmers around the country utilize the internet as part of their marketing strategy. Check out some of these web sites.

### Farmers Markets

[The Columbia City Farmers Market](http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/don/columbia/farmmkt.htm) (Seattle, Washington) <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/don/columbia/farmmkt.htm>

[Farmers Market Online](http://www.farmersmarketonline.com) <http://www.farmersmarketonline.com>

[Pike Place Market](http://www.pikeplacemarket.org/) (Seattle, Washington) <http://www.pikeplacemarket.org/>

### Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

[Goodlett's Farmlett](http://www.halcyon.com/bbrown/farmlett.htm) (Auburn, Washington) <http://www.halcyon.com/bbrown/farmlett.htm>

[Eatwell Farm](http://www.eatwell.com/) (California) <http://www.eatwell.com/>

### Livestock & Dairy

[Kaeler's Mill Farm](http://www.execpc.com/~slc/k-m.html) (Cedarburg, Wisconsin) <http://www.execpc.com/~slc/k-m.html>

[Hog Wild Specialties](http://www.hogwild.ab.ca/profile.html) (Alberta, Canada) <http://www.hogwild.ab.ca/profile.html>

[Egg Farm Dairy](http://www.creamery.com/) (Yorktown Heights, NY) <http://www.creamery.com/>

### Food and Produce

[Cascadian Farms](http://www.cfarm.com/index.asp) (Sedro-Woolley, Washington) <http://www.cfarm.com/index.asp>

[HomeGrocer.com](http://www.homegrocer.com) (Bellevue, Washington) <http://www.homegrocer.com>

[Family Trees Gardens and Ponds](http://home.att.net/~p.e.s/index.html) (Vashon Island, Washington) <http://home.att.net/~p.e.s/index.html>

[Walnut Acres Organic Farms](http://www.walnutacres.com/) (Penns Creek, PA) <http://www.walnutacres.com/>

[The US Organic Agriculture Message Board](http://www.paradise-web.com/plus/plus.mirage?who=lray) "...where producers can communicate directly to consumers what they have available, and where consumers can post what they are looking for in the way of produce." <http://www.paradise-web.com/plus/plus.mirage?who=lray>

### Newsletters and Forums

An extensive list of newsgroups, newsletters and forums can be found at <http://metalab.unc.edu/farming-connection/forums.html>

## Challenges of internet marketing

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Internet marketing is not for everybody. It has its challenges and pitfalls so it may not be the marketing strategy for you (from *Guerrilla Marketing Online: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Earning Profits on the Internet* by Jay Conrad Levinson and Charles Rubin. 1997).

- It is hard work!
- Internet marketing requires at least a basic understanding of computers and the online world.
- A computer, software, and an internet connection are required.
- Bad news travels quickly. If the wrong message gets out about your service or product, beware.
- There is no one in charge to turn to. Finding help is up to you.
- The online market consists of many submarkets so you have to learn to identify and reach the ones for your product.
- Graphics can be costly and time consuming for readers of your messages.
- Messages are invisible unless readers seek them out so placing and using enticing messages is important.
- Engaging customers requires well-written copy, a helpful attitude, and reliable service.
- Online transactions may require a secure method of payment.
- Responses must be monitored regularly because your messages are up at all times and people expect speedy results.

- Internet marketing may generate an unanticipated amount of email and response. You must be prepared to deal with it.

## Finding help

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Despite these challenges, internet marketing can be worthwhile and there are many helpful resources.

### ✓ Email and internet services

Many email services are free! Some require that you receive unsolicited advertising, but others do not. Shop around. Some services to start with are:

[@g Online](http://www.agriculture.com/homestead/index.htm) <http://www.agriculture.com/homestead/index.htm>, a free resource specifically for farmers. "You can create your own home page - in your own words - right here, right now, for free!",

[juno.com](http://juno.com) [support@juno.com](mailto:support@juno.com) or call the automated information hotline at (800) JUNO-889 [(800) 586-889]. E-mail software without the need for an internet connection. Just dial into their service and collect or send your mail-all via modem,

[microsoft's hotmail](http://www.hotmail.com) <http://www.hotmail.com>, web-based email,

[rocketmail](http://www.rocketmail.com/) <http://www.rocketmail.com/>, web-based email,

[seattle community network](http://help@scn.org) [help@scn.org](mailto:help@scn.org) or call (206) 365-4528, a free public-access network run by volunteers,

or, surf the web to get information on free or fee-based internet services. Many web sites review several internet services. Try <http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Vista/8015/index.html>.

### ✓ Computers, equipment, and software

New or used computers are available for a range of prices. Used computers can be purchased through classified ads or from used computer stores.

Check consumer guides to buying computers. Talk to friends about their computers. Get clear on your computer needs.

Some software is free or available for trial via the internet.

### ✓ Regulations

Washington State Department of Licensing's website for [Business Licenses](http://www.wa.gov/dol/bpd/buslic.htm) <http://www.wa.gov/dol/bpd/buslic.htm>

Call (800) 237-1233, a statewide, toll-free information and referral service, provides information regarding state business licensing, registration, technical assistance, other state agencies or one-to-one business counseling.

Federal Trade Commission Mail or Telephone Order Merchandise Rule <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/mailordr/toc.htm>

### ✓ Resources

Books:

*Guerrilla Marketing Online: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Earning Profits on the Internet* by Jay Conrad Levinson and Charles Rubin. 1997.

*Marketing Online for Dummies* by Bud Smith and Frank Catalano. 1998.

Web Sites:

[Sustainable Farming Connection](http://sunsite.unc.edu/farming-connection/growmark/netmark/netmark.htm): Where farmers find and share information <http://sunsite.unc.edu/farming-connection/growmark/netmark/netmark.htm> "This site — conceived and managed by former staff members of The New Farm magazine — will help you tame costs, add value to what you sell and keep you informed of the latest news from the sustainable farming community."

[All The Secrets...](http://www.networkx.com.au/mall/secrets/index.htm) <http://www.networkx.com.au/mall/secrets/index.htm> : "... a site for Internet Entrepreneurs, home-office workers, small business owners, telecommuters, freelance writers, and everyone who wants to get rid of their boss and make their own way in life."

[Grow a Home Business On The Internet](http://www.smithfam.com/) <http://www.smithfam.com/> "Along with the leading Internet Marketing professionals we share successful Internet marketing concepts free for your Internet based home business."

[The Food Trader's Exchange](http://www.tfte.com/) <http://www.tfte.com/> An internet food trading company. This site allows you to post your products for sale into the global market place.

[The Internet Marketing Center](http://www.marketingtips.com/index.html) <http://www.marketingtips.com/index.html> "Marketing tips, strategies, and secrets for internet marketing, online advertising and website promotion that will skyrocket your small, medium or home based business profits through the roof."

## Terms to know

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**Internet (the Net)**-the network that connects most of the computers on the planet.

**Internet service**-a service on the internet that meets agreed-on, public standards so that any computer on the Internet can access that service using any of a variety of available software packages (e.g. email, world wide web).

**E-mail (electronic mail)**-an internet service in which typed messages are exchanged between computer users by sending messages to specific addresses and receiving them in mailboxes.

**Online service**-A large commercial bulletin board service (BBS) that offers a wide variety of services and information to thousands of users and charges a monthly subscription fee (e.g., America Online, CompuServe, Wolfenet).

**World Wide Web (the Web)**-a collection of information located on many Internet servers that can be accessed with a browser.

**Browser**-a program used to access information on the Web (e.g. Netscape, Mosaic, Microsoft Internet Explorer).

**Mailing list**- an electronic discussion carried out with email messages.

**Listserv**-a well known mailing list manager program; sometimes used as a generic name for a mailing list manager.

**Newsgroup**-a message board on the Internet that focuses on a particular subject. Also known as a Usenet newsgroup.

**Spam**-Mass mailing of unsolicited electronic messages (*junk email, or bulk email*) to a large number of discussion groups or individuals on the Net. Most commercial online services have strict policies forbidding their subscribers from sending spam.

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## Alternate formats available upon request. 206-205-3100 (TTY 711)

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